

**THE EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT FEEDBACK  
ON EFL LEARNERS' GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY; THE  
CASE OF REGULAR PAST TENSE IN ENGLISH**

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**Abstract:**

This quasi-experimental study was an attempt to examine the effects of two types of corrective feedback, namely recast and metalinguistic feedback on the acquisition of English regular past tense-ed by Iranian EFL learners. To this end, 45 female learners of English at a low intermediate level were randomly selected as the participants of this study and were assigned into two experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups received recast and metalinguistic focused feedback on the target form following picture description tasks while the learners in the control group received no feedback. The acquisition of regular past tense-ed was measured by means of metalinguistic knowledge and oral imitation tests. The results of the one-way ANOVA showed that the experimental groups who received corrective feedback outperformed the control group who did not receive any feedback. The findings of the study also indicated that there were no significance differences between the two types of corrective feedback in terms of learners' performance in an EFL context. The results of this study are considered to be useful in error correction techniques, syllabus and task designers especially in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** corrective feedback, metalinguistic feedback, recast, task-based language teaching, regular past tense

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## **1. Introduction**

A growing body of research has concerned with the role of conversational interaction in SLA, It is acknowledged that when learners engage in classroom interactions they can obtain comprehensible input, receive feedback, have opportunity to negotiate for meaning, have opportunity to reformulate their own utterances and produce modified output, all of which promote the development of learners' interlanguage (Gass and Varonis, 1984, 1985b; 1995; Oliver, 1995; Pica, 1994, 1998). However, most of the researchers consider positive evidence and communicative activities which focus solely on meaning processing are not adequate for learning a second language and a certain amount of focus on form and corrective feedback is needed (e.g. Hatch, 1978; Long, 1983, 1996, 1997a; White, 1987; Ellis 2001; Schmidt, 1983; Swain, 1991a). According to Lightbown & Spada (1999), second language learners benefit from corrective feedback provided they are within communicative contexts. Currently SLA researchers strongly believe that error correction and corrective feedback could promote SLA (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Ellis, 1993, 1994; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 1995; Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam, 2006). According to Mackey (2000) an overall definition of corrective feedback is responding to learner utterances that contain an error. Several studies have investigated the effects of different types of corrective feedback in second language classrooms (Mackey, Gass, and McDonough, 2000; Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2004; Loewen, 2004; Sheen, 2004). The most inclusive taxonomy of corrective feedback has been provided by Lyster and Ranta (1997), who classified the common types of classroom feedback into six categories in four 4<sup>th</sup> grade French immersion classes. They include: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. Among these, the aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of recasts and metalinguistic feedback on the development of EFL learner's grammatical accuracy. The following review of literature is mainly devoted to the two types of corrective feedback, investigated in this study.

## **2. Corrective feedback and L2 development**

To date, substantial body of research on corrective feedback studies has examined the effects of different types of corrective feedback in second language classrooms in order to determine which types are more or less effective for language learning (e.g. Mackey and Philip, 1998;



Braidi, 2002; Leeman, 2003; Lyster and Ranta 2004, Sheen, 2004; Loewen, 2004). However, which types of corrective feedback are more influential is still unsubstantiated. Among different types of corrective feedback proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997), metalinguistic feedback is considered as the explicit feedback and recast as the implicit types of feedback. In that way, the main concern of the present study is to investigate and compare the effects of two types of corrective feedback (recast and metalinguistic) treatment on the development of L2 learners' grammatical accuracy. These two types of feedback were chosen because they occur relatively frequently during classroom interactions, and they differ in the level of explicitness and implicitness. According to Lyster (1998) all corrective feedback is classified either as explicit or implicit in form. Implicit feedback in the form of recasts, defined as corrective feedback technique that reformulates the students' incorrect utterance while maintaining the intended meaning of the utterance (Ellis et al., 2006). Research has shown that recasts are the most frequently used type of corrective feedback in and out of classroom (Oliver, 1995; Lyster & Rants, 1997; Braidi, 2002; Sheen, 2004). Loewen & Philp (2006) found that recasts make for the most common form of corrective feedback because they save time, they are not as intimidating to student confidence, and they generally keep a flow of interaction repair. Long's interaction hypothesis (1996) maintained that recasts are effective in promoting L2 development because they usually occur during meaning focused activities. In such cases, recasts are believed to provide learners with both comprehensible input and focus on form (Leeman, 2003; Schmidt, 2001). However, Metalinguistic feedback, defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as " comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the learner's utterance". Metalinguistic feedback can lead learners to self-repair, whereas recasts can lead only to repetition of correct forms by learners (Lyster, 2007). The advantage of such a corrective feedback is that unlike recasts, learners are less likely to misconstrue the feedback intention. However, a caveat for using metalinguistic feedback is that it is obtrusive and disrupts the flow of communication (Lyster, 2002, P. 405).

Within the last 15 years, multiple studies have been done to compare which type of corrective feedback is more effective for L2 learners. Carroll and Swain (1993) found that those learners who received explicit corrective feedback outperformed those learners who received implicit corrective feedback. Sheen (2006b) also demonstrated that those learners who received metalinguistic feedback outperformed those who received recast. Similarly, Ellis (2009)

compared the effects of recasts with metalinguistic feedback and found that metalinguistics were more effective than recasts. Other studies, in contrast, reported the beneficial effects of implicit types of corrective feedback such as recasts. Loewen & Philp (2006) found that recasts make for the most common form of corrective feedback because they save time, they are not as intimidating to student confidence, and they generally keep a flow of interaction repair. Leeman (2003) indicated the beneficial effects of recasts types of corrective feedback on any measure in control group. So, the recast group outperformed the control group. Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004) also found that explicit types of corrective feedback may have not any additional advantages over implicit corrective feedback.

### **3. Research questions**

In order to investigate the effects of recast and metalinguistic feedback on the acquisition of English regular past tense-ed by elementary Iranian EFL learners of English, the current study seeks the following research questions:

- 1: Does providing two types of corrective feedback, namely, recast & metalinguistic following picture description tasks have any differential effects on low-intermediate EFL learners' acquisition of regular past tense-ed based on oral-imitation and metalinguistic tests ?
- 2: Is there any significant difference between the two types of corrective feedback, namely, recast & metalinguistic following picture description tasks in the extent they contribute to EFL learner's grammar knowledge of regular past tense-ed based on oral-imitation and metalinguistic tests?

### **4. Method**

The present study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test, treatment, and post-test design using intact EFL classrooms. Learners in two intact classes formed experimental groups and received treatment, while the third group served as a control group.



#### 4.1 Participants

The participants of current study were 45 elementary female students from three intact classes at level three from private language school in Urmia (Iran) with Interchange series textbooks as the syllabus of institute to fulfill the purpose of design in research. Of the whole participants five were excluded due to their inadequate English proficiency for the purpose of this study and four others were excluded since they missed some of the treatment sessions. Finally 45 participants remained. Each of these three intact classes was assigned to a treatment condition (i.e., recast, metalinguistic) and a control group. Each class consisted of 15 female students. Students received about an hour-and-a half of EFL instruction 2 days a week. Their mean age was 15.15 years (range: 11-19, SD: 2.14). The students had reported an average of 4.25 years of receiving formal classroom instruction in learning English in Iran, and were uniformly from the same grade level, nationality, or gender. Because of institutional constraints, it was not possible to assign students randomly to experimental groups, and thus we had to work with intact groups.

#### 4.2. Instruments

In order to measure learners' gains which might have occurred as a result of the treatment, the instruments used in this study were, metalinguistic knowledge test and an oral imitation test to elicit required structure from the participants once as a pretest and as a posttest. The pretest was administered to learners one day before the treatments began. The posttest was administered after the treatment finished. Furthermore, Kuder-Richardson formula 21 (KR-21) determined the reliability of the pretest and posttest. The Value of the reliability coefficient for the oral imitation test was 0.54, and for the metalinguistic test was 0.

$$r_{xx'}(\text{oral imitation}) = 0.54$$

$$r_{xx'}(\text{metalinguistics}) = 0.50$$

Comprehension test was given in the form of a metalinguistic knowledge test. The metalinguistic knowledge test (see appendix A), consisted of ten items, targeting linguistic structure of regular past tense-ed. Students were given ten sentences and told the items are grammatically incorrect. Four of the error contained past tense-ed, with the other six questions acting as distracter items.

The distracters were incorporated in order to avoid making learners sensitive to the target structure in the pretest. In every sentence; the section containing the error was underlined. Learners were then asked to 1) correct the error and 2) explain, in writing, what was incorrect about the sentence in their own words in English.

In the metalinguistic test, students scored one point for correcting the mistake and one point for an accurate explanation of the error. Learners received scores for the four past tense-ed grammar points. Students could receive a maximum of four points for correcting the mistake and a maximum of four points for an accurate explanation of the error. Therefore, the students could receive a maximum total of eight points.

Pretest was piloted with a similar group of participants, studying at the same level of language proficiency at the same language institute to determine item characteristics, i.e., item facility, item discrimination, and choice distribution. The questions were designed by the researcher herself.

After metalinguistic test, Students involved and took an oral imitation test, the metalinguistic test measured learners' explicit knowledge, but in this production test, students retold "johns' last weekend" they received a picture sequence and then tried to orally describe a day in the life of John. The researcher transcribed all the instances of past-ed receiving corrective feedback. The test was a paper and pencil test.

During this section, students received a picture sequence and then effort to orally describe a sequence of events (johns' last weekend'). Again, students had pictures and bare infinitives with no text to tell a story in regular past tense-ed. these bare infinitives gave the students verbs to put into simple past and help them tell the story. Pictures were chosen in order to meet the objectives of using action verbs with regular past-ed. Students explained a day in the life of john, and were told to tell the story loud using the simple past. Students again had five minutes of telling of the

day in the life of the character. Each picture was a separate event. Students must start their telling with “last week...” (See appendix B).

For the oral imitation test, students received no scores if the target structure was avoided or not correctly used. Learners scored one point for each correct usage of past tense-ed in each separate picture. Since there were nine pictures of John with separate events, students could receive a total of nine points. Students received no score if the target structure was avoided, or the target structure was incorrectly imitated.

For treatment, this study used picture description task in order to elicit learners' knowledge of past tense-ed form during treatment sessions for both the experimental and the control group (see Appendix C). Students were given a set of four pictures and accompanying written narrative about the pictures. The students were given as much time as they need to read the story and then the written narratives were taken away. The students were left with the pictures and a set of bare infinitives. (For example, walk, look, gaze, scream, glance, visit ...) which they were told they would need in order to retell the story. A total of four pictures described the picture sequence that illustrated a story. The students were then told to tell their story to the rest of the students in classroom; therefore they could meet and identify the objective of using action verbs with regular past-ed. passages had lots of tokens of the target structure (regular past tense-ed) embedded in it. In this study, focused task was used which is “an activity which has all the characteristics of a task but has been designed to induce learner's attention to some specific linguistic form when processing either input or output” (Ellis, 2003; p.342). In other words, they were designed to encourage the use of particular linguistic forms and, to this end, learners were provided with certain linguistic prompts.

#### 4.3. Procedure

During the first part of the instructional procedure, learners did not receive feedback from the teacher. Learners in each group were given a picture sequence that illustrated a story, they also were given a written version of the same story (see appendix C).Learners were provided with



pictures and written text underneath the pictures. These pictures and text provided one coherent story of connected events. Learners read the written story out loud to the teacher and received no feedback and no instruction while reading the text out loud to the teacher. This read-a-loud was important because students could have a base for their retelling of the narrative and help to establish simple past-ed.

Next, during the second part of the instructional procedure, learners were given the same set of pictures. Learners were told they had five minutes to read the story, look at the pictures and retell the story with as much detail as possible. They could not use or write any notes to assist them. Next, after reading the passage loud, the written narrative was removed and replaced with a set of bare infinitives from the story. The pictures and bare infinitives told the same story of connected events. The learners had to retell the story in the same order. These verbs guided the learners through their retelling of the story while the teacher gave corrective feedback to them. During this part of the instructional procedure, instruction for retelling was needed. The teacher gave the verbal cue “Last week...” in order to establish simple past tense-ed. Students then retold the picture sequence using bare infinitives under the picture.

Feedback was given to the students in the form of recasts for group one and metalinguistic feedback for group two (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Therefore, this task was designed to measure the effects of both types of feedback on development of L2 grammar knowledge of the participants.

In this study statistical packages for the social students (SPSS software) was utilized to analyze the quantitative data. All the data were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis, where descriptive statistical procedures and further calculations were carried out. To see if there was significant difference between two types of corrective feedback (recast & metalinguistic), one-way ANOVA was applied. To determine significance throughout the study, the significance level was set at  $P > .05$ .



#### 4. RESULTS

To establish whether the differences between two groups in the pretest were significant, one-way ANOVA formula was performed on the pretest scores before the study. Table 4.1 shows the results. According to table 4.1, the amount of significance in oral-imitation pretest is 2.17 and in metalinguistic pretest is 1.86. Since the amount of significance in both (oral-imitation & metalinguistic) pretests is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that two groups were homogenous in the pretest. As mentioned before, all of the learners were chosen with the same level of proficiency .therefore, the results of the one-way ANOVA test showed that there were not significant differences among the groups in both (oral imitation and metalinguistics) pretests.

**Table 4.1** One-way ANOVA for the pretest

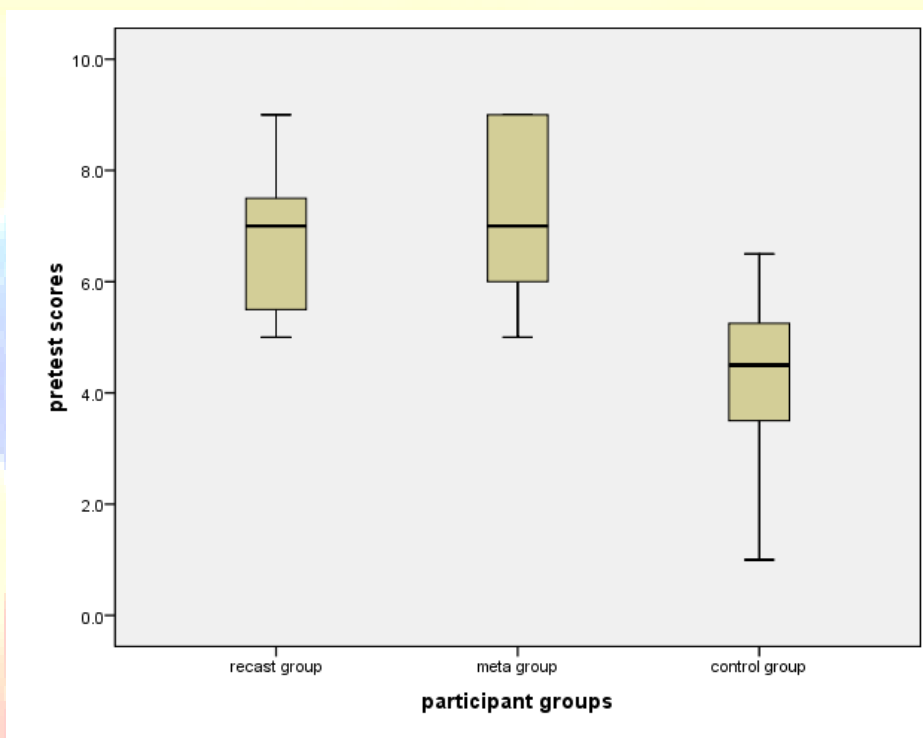
		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
pretest oral imitation	Between Groups	7.08	3.54	2.17	.13
	Within Groups	68.00	1.62		
	Total	75.08			
pretest meta	Between Groups	2.53	1.27	1.86	.17
	Within Groups	28.67	.68		
	Total				

$$F_{\text{oral imitation}} (2, 42) = 2.17; p > 0.05$$

$$F_{\text{metalinguistics}} (2, 42) = 1.86; p > 0.05$$

Furthermore, in order to make sure that one-way ANOVA could be used for the statistical analysis, the box plot of the pretest was checked for the three groups. The box plot helps the researcher in identifying extreme scores and outliers.

The following figure shows that there were neither outliers nor extreme values in the data. Therefore, the ANOVA could be used for the analysis to determine whether differences between groups were significant or not, and to decide whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis.



**Figure 4.1** Box plot for the pretest scores

To investigate possible learning gains caused by treatment materials among the groups and, to answer the research questions posed in this study, one-way ANOVA was performed. The results of one-way ANOVA showed that there were significance differences among groups in both (oral-imitation and metalinguistic) posttests. Table 4.2 shows the results of the analysis.



**Table 4.2** One-way ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
posttest oral imitation	Between Groups	23.81	2	11.91	6.05	.01
	Within Groups	82.67	42	1.97		
	Total	106.48	44			
posttest meta	Between Groups	67.73	2	33.87	30.88	.00
	Within Groups	46.07	42	1.10		
	Total	113.80	44			

$$F_{\text{oral imitation}} (2, 42) = 6.05; p < 0.05$$

$$F_{\text{metalinguistics}} (2, 42) = 30.88; p < 0.05$$

As table 4.2 displays, the results of the one-way ANOVA test showed that there is a statistically significance differences among groups in both posttests. This suggests that corrective feedback had a significant effect on learner’s performance. In other words, the null hypotheses were rejected in both oral-imitation and metalinguistic tests at p-value less than 0.05:

Although, the above table shows that there were significant differences among groups but it does not show the exact location of the differences. For this purpose, a post hoc analysis was carried out. Table 4.3 demonstrates the results of the analysis in *post-hoc* Tukey test.

**Table 4.3** Post hoc Tukey test

Dependent Variable	(I) participant groups	(J) participant groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.

posttest oral imitation	recast group	meta group	-.20	.5123	.92
		control group	1.43*	.5123	.02
	meta group	recast group	.20	.5123	.92
		control group	1.63*	.5123	.01
	control group	recast group	-1.43*	.5123	.02
		meta group	-1.63*	.5123	.01
posttest meta	recast group	meta group	.13	.3824	.94
		control group	2.67*	.3824	.00
	meta group	recast group	-.13	.3824	.94
		control group	2.53*	.3824	.00
	control group	recast group	-2.67*	.3824	.00
		meta group	-2.53*	.3824	.00

The results of Tukey's *post-hoc* comparisons for post-test scores revealed another story. No statistically significant difference was observed between the metalinguistic and recast feedback groups in both (oral-imitation and metalinguistic) tests ( $p > 0.05$ ).

## 5. DISSCUSSION

The results of findings of the present study indicated that, in an EFL context, recast and metalinguistic feedback were effective. That is, learners in the two experimental (metalinguistic and recast) groups performed better than those who were in the control group (i.e., with no corrective feedback). The findings of this study lend support to the view that implicit as well as explicit types of feedback assist low-intermediate EFL learners in learning grammar. These results seem to support the conclusions from several previous studies in the EFL context (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Nagata, 1993; Muranoi, 2000; Carroll, 2001; Harranek & Cesnik, 2003; Lyster,



2004; Ellis et al., 2006; etc) proposing that corrective feedback has a significant effect on learner' performance.

In this study, learners were provided with two types of implicit recast and explicit metalinguistic feedback in an EFL context. The findings support the important role of both (implicit & explicit) feedback types in enabling learners to deal with grammatical accuracy difficulties.

In terms of recast feedback, finding confirms the results of previous studies (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Leeman, 2003; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philip, 1998; Morris, 2002a; Muranoi, 2000; Naebi & Swain, 2002; Lyster, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2004; Oliver, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2002; Mackey, Gass & Mcdonough, 2000; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Braid, 2002) concerning the effects of implicit negative feedback, such as recast on learner's second language development when engaged in form-focused task. This finding is specifically in line with what Doughty and Varela (1998) have found in their study regarding the effect of corrective recast in comparison with other techniques and strategies of focus on form. Moreover, Long and Robinson (1998) also state that recasts are appreciated by many, in that they show to learners the distance between what uttered by the learners and the target language. Nicholas et al., (2001) also mention that recasts are valuable in acquisition because by reformulation, recasts give the positive effect, and at the same time they focus on form.

In terms of metalinguistic feedback, the findings are also in line with those who reported by Carroll & Swain (199), Rosa & Leow (2004), Lyster (2004), Sheen(2006b) who found the important role of explicit feedback in L2 acquisition.

Regarding the second research question, however, comparison of the results indicated that the significant difference between recast and metalinguistic groups was blurred. In other words, ANOVA showed no significant effects for groups, meaning that the groups did not differ significantly from each other in performance on either of the post-tests. The findings of this study is in line with DeKeyser (1993) who found no difference between the group receiving extensive explicit feedback and the group receiving limited explicit feedback. The results of the

present study also confirmed Kim & Mathes (2001), Carroll (2001) findings, who also failed to find any statistically significant differences in the scores of the explicit and implicit groups. Moreover Sanz (2003) indicated that both implicit and explicit groups considerably increased ability to supply the target structure with no differences between the groups.

Although there have been a lot of research studies in the literature regarding the comparative examination of the effect of implicit and explicit focus on form, the present study could be considered as an additional support for focus on form and corrective feedback research. Finally, it is worth mentioning that both of these techniques of focus on form led to better accuracy in both experimental and control groups, but after comparing the gains in the two groups, the above-mentioned findings were achieved.

One of the possible reasons as to why there was no significant learning as a result of error feedback in this study may have been that the learners in this study were not at a development stage in which they were ready to learn past tense. Dulay and Burt (1974) indicate that regular past tense is late acquired by L2 English learners, and then learners in the present study were beginner learners according to their own, and the institutes' assessment.

In the light of the argument above, the answer to research question posed in the current study is straightforward: concerning the first research question, the results presented in the preceding section show that between the two types of corrective feedback investigated in the current study, both metalinguistic feedback and recast lead to an increase in learner's performance in posttests. However, concerning the second research question, the results in the posttest indicated that, no statistically significant difference was observed between recast and metalinguistic groups.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the two types of corrective feedback, demonstrating higher gains after the application of two CF types. Therefore, this study indicates some support for the use of



corrective feedback and focus-on-form rather than the use of traditional focus-on-forms. Moreover, teachers need to be familiarized with the different types of corrective feedback to keep the communicative nature of language classes to provide opportunities for focus on form. So, it would be reasonable to allocate some time to the training of teachers in this regard. Teacher workshops might help those inexperienced teachers to improve their techniques (Mackey, 2004). Finally, the results of this study might be of interest to practitioners, as well as material developers, in designing tasks with focus on form, as well as implementing different techniques of corrective feedback to attend to both accuracy and fluency in language learning.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Metalinguistic knowledge test

In every sentence, the section containing the error is underlined.

First correct the error and then explain what is incorrect about the sentence in your own words in English.

1. Twelve students listens to the teacher.
2. Yesterday I call my friend.
3. Last week, we visit the grocery store.
4. The man is wear a coat.
5. Rick stays home on Saturday.
6. I cook dinner for my friends last night.
7. Jack is tall than john.
8. We watch TV last night for an hour.
9. me and Jill like to go to the movies.
10. Yesterday, I move my apartment last week.

### APPENDIX B: Oral-imitation test

**APPENDIX C: picture-description task**

Picture 1 was a narrative, entitled “catching a thief”. Below the picture, learners read the following passage:

*Two men and women followed the boys chasing the burglar. The boys attacked the burglar. They jumped on his back trying to tackle him down. the two men and woman watching just stood there. They pointed and laughed while the boys attacked the burglar. The director watched the actors try to finish the scene. He yelled at them after he saw all the people laughing.*

